



CONSUELO JONES



**ALSO BY
KENNETH HOWARD SMITH**

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KENNETH HOWARD SMITH Ψ CONSUELO JONES

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SDC OmniMedia Group Books
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FOR MY DAUGHTERS,

Kristine, Krystle and Sara

WHO HAVE ENRICHED MY LIFE BEYOND MEASURE

And to their Mothers who are women of great strength and character.

KENNETH HOWARD SMITH Ψ CONSUELO JONES

Consuelo Jones

PROLOGUE

It was the beginning of the border wars between the States of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and the drug cartels which now has invaded the governments of Mexico. It started out as just marijuana, some small guns and simple "white slavery" crossing the Border States. It was a time when the United States of America declared a war on drugs that would have a lot of political consequences for the drug agencies for taking credit and getting the lion's share of the monies to promote its' agenda. When promoting a self titled war, you must have some victims, some bad guys, and some bad politicians and some bad countries.

Chapter One

The congressional hill was full of life today, as the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee was hurrying into session. Escalation of violence on the Border States had spread into the major cities, crossing the United States border with little resistance. Over one hundred American citizens and law enforcement officers had been brutally murdered and Mexico was totally out of control.

The questions on the minds of the congressmen were, if the United States was under attack at the present, what could we do to repel the enemy?

There were over twelve million illegal aliens walking the streets of the ever major city and small city in the states.

We were already occupied and losing control of the borders was in hindsight. We had to take back our streets and our country. What and who had a plan of action to help in this hour of our needs?

The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Military's War College has generally been the place for all military planning and the "think tank" for operations. Usually these plans were created out of the imaginative and forward thinking minds of the young officers and non-commissioned officers that had been chosen to attend these classes for several weeks. At the end of the class, each student is given a situation and must create a scenario for the start and ending of the conflict.

The congressman's research assistant, decided to check out the military's database for an operational plan that included drugs, gun running, kidnapping, border insurgence and foreign occupation of the homeland with the next door neighbors government in shambles.

The computer search revealed only one plan with all of those elements written by one 2nd Lieutenant Consuelo Louise Jones in the late seventies. Each student had to name their project, and most of them gave them great names.

Lieutenant Consuelo Jones' essay was entitled "Project Santa Ana Hidalgo." The congressman gave the plan a quick read, and decided that this plan was very viable, but could use an update to the present situation.

Generally to update a project, the original author is contacted and requested to come back to the war college and contribute to advancing the plan to implementation.

It was her forty-fifth birthday and only one more year before she would retire from the United States Air Force Reserve with the permeate rank of Lieutenant Colonel. It was not bad for a girl that had no chance of advancing in ranks with the Air Force. It was a rocky start for young Consuelo in the beginning when she was denied a chance to go to the military academy in Colorado. It was all about politics and Connie was not afraid of speaking her mind, and usually at the peril of her own career.

She normally would question everything that was placed in front of her, whether the green peas on her plate came from a can or were they fresh frozen from a bag, to the question of a belly button on Adam and Eve's story from the Garden of Eden. It's not hard to say, that at Sunday school, her teachers would cringed when the young Consuelo Louise Jones would show up on time and being the first in class when the teachers arrived.

Connie to her family, friends and her very close acquaintances was also the kindest person one could ever meet. She helped out at the assisted living center for the old folks, and picked up trash on the side of the road. She believed in keeping America beautiful and free.

Consuelo Louise Jones, her given name was born to loving parents in the small town of Rosamond, California. By the age of ten, she could speak four languages fluidly and had written two kid's books for how to rise vegetables in small spaces on your window ledge.

This small desert town in the Antelope Valley nestled between the foothills of the Tropical Mountains and the Tehachapi Mountains. This small community in its heyday was the site of gold. Then years later, the gateway to the stars.

Rosamond is in the middle of the Antelope Valley in the high desert of Southern California. Founded by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1875, the assigned station master, a young black man by the name of Robert Graves, Sr., who was one of the volunteers to man UP Stop Number 37 was given an opportunity of a live time. A chance to own some land and settle down as the post master and station master with a pension.

The name of Rosamond was given to the station by Graves as he received a promotion as the station master, as no one really wanted to be stuck out in the middle of the desert. Another duty of the station master was also to create and maintain a local school. The population of Rosamond at this time was about 50 people and maybe fifteen children.

What made the offer so attractive was that the railroad gave Graves a chance to homestead as much of the land he could by riding his horse from sun up and placing his land stakes in a four corner ride and returning to the very spot before the sunset.

This land grab included the undiscovered Tropical Gold Mine, which would deliver to the United States Treasury a total of \$20 Million by the end of its run in 1957.

The land holding also included the legendary Willow Springs area that the Overland Stage Lines would made in western movie folklore, and the home of Country and Western music and movie legend Spade Cooley.

So, it's not to far fetch that Consuelo Jones was a certified desert rat, and the origins given to her, she was a free spirit that loved to explore the desert lands by day after school, and glazed at the stars by night.

Connie was invited to an archeological dig in the Barstow-Calico Ghost town area with the legendary Doctor Mary Leaky. Two weeks in the brush and dirt, Connie paid the weather little attention, as she was use to this effect of the hot dry heat, while others complained ad nausea mum.

Another of Connie's adventures was to go cave climbing, and as an active member of the National Speleological Society she managed to descend in several caves in the Death Valley region and discovered a new species of fish with no eyes. Connie's discovery made the cover of the National Geographic Magazine and Science News magazines all over the world.

In the days of early computers, Connie proved to be a whiz kid at fortran and cobalt programming. She was an early candidate for developing new languages that she help to simplify in a basic structure using machine code.

Connie's grandfather was an employee of the Hughes Tool Company, and she spent many hours working with him as a volunteer in the assisted living homes with the elderly, a training that would help her later in her life. Connie vacillated between being a doctor of veterinary medicine or an astronaut following the likes of Nicole Nichols on Star Trek.

Rosamond known for it's agriculturally rich soil, as the local farmers produced miles of sugar beets, cotton, large onions and alfalfa grasses for the race horses in the city. This sleepy little hovel was the secret getaway and hiding place for the likes of early Hollywood stars including Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Robert Taylor and Ava Gardner, Spike Jones, Spade Cooley and their spouses and friends.

One other secret citizen which had a small farm for race horses was Howard Hughes. It would be years later that everyone in town would know that the farm did belong to Howard Hughes. No one ever saw Mr. Hughes. It was just rumors.

Young Connie was just nine years old when she and her daddy were out in the back country of Rosamond hunting jack rabbits, when on their return trip back to the house on one of the unpaved dusty roads that runs for miles in the desert; they approached an old man in soiled gray overalls walking toward town. There was no cars, horses and anything insight. It was a very hot midday and this old man with no hat on his head or any water was walking toward the town of Rosamond.

Daddy pulled in from of him, and stopped the old Ford truck that belonged to his father. As the man approached the passenger side of the truck, daddy asked him if he needed any help or if he could take him anywhere closes by. The old man's eyes were transfixed on the canvassed dented canteen laying on the seat of the truck that was sweating from the cold liquid inside and the contrasting hot, that caused the beads of moisture to trickle down the container.

Daddy reached for his old battered canteen that he has used as a boy in the cub scouts and handed it to him. The water in the canteen was very cold with some

ice in it. The old man, just reached for the canteen, removing the cap, one could smelt the water, the crisp pure clean refreshing nectar that was at the tip the trim that poured so slowly out of the spout to his dry lips and mouth.

Connie looked into his eyes as the cold liquid touched his parched tongue and his eyes rejoiced.

With a hasty, "Ahh, this is great." The old man held the vessel for what seemed along time, and then handed back the canteen to my dad, and said that he was headed to town to make a telephone call for his car.

Daddy introduced himself, and told him that we had a telephone at our house, and that he was more than welcome to use it. The old man introduced himself as Howard and that he was working at a local horse ranch a couple of miles from here and he had just decided he had enough of the ranch and was going back to the house in Nevada.

We understood that the ranch house had no telephone there and his only neighbors were us, and we lived several miles from him. Howard further stated that he had been out on the ranch for over a couple of weeks and it was time to go home.

Daddy asked if his car had broken down. But all Howard would say was, that they did not leave him one. They had left him a lot of food and he had a television and radio. But no telephone was installed at the ranch as no one was there for most of the year and all of the horses were in Los Angeles with the caretakers.

We headed back to our house with the Howard. He never said much and he never even looked around, just straight ahead out of the truck window. Upon reaching the house, Dad invited Howard in and he slowly moved the chair out, and sat at the table. Daddy was a coffee drinker. Howard just wanted another clean glass of cold water, which daddy got for him.

The telephone was the standard old rotary dial phone for its day, black and very heavy, and a party line phone. Daddy pushed the phone in front of him and we left the room for his privacy.

After a couple of minutes on the phone, I could hear, this person on the other end, saying, "sir, where are you again?" Howard would tell him that he was ok and at a neighbors house near the Rosamond ranch. Howard asked my daddy what was the address and telephone number here.

It must have been a couple of minutes later when the call was concluded. Howard told my daddy that he was expecting another call, and would it be ok to receive a couple of calls back. Daddy told him it was fine and to take all the time he needed.

I remember going back to the dining room table and sitting in the chair next to Howard.

"There is a private airstrip here in town? Howard asked.

"Yes there is. It belongs to Robert Graves and George McClendon over on 55th street." Daddy, the Graves and McClendon's were neighbors and part of the Southern Kern County Game Wardens. It was part of the Kern County Sheriff's Department. Out in the rural area where Connie lived in, the shortage of sheriff deputies for these large places were augmented with local residents and land owners. By giving the locals game warden badges, it was a cheap and easy way to have law and order and backup for the lonely sheriff's deputy. Also, the Graves and McClendon's were on the board of county supervisors.

"Got a number for them?"

"Yes, I do.

The telephone calls were getting fast and furious as the activity for Howard was pinpointing his location. To Connie, it was exciting. Only thing she could think of was this Howard guy must be someone very important.

He just looked like an old hermit, long white stringy hair and beard. His hands were very pale and his face was blotched with red spots that looked as if they wanted to bleed at any moment.

Being in the house for almost over an hour now, Howard's skin tones began to cold off and the redness in his face began to turn to a normal color and hue. He was relaxed now as the red spots began to fade from his face and hands.

The phone ring again and daddy answered it, handing it directly to Howard. All that he could say was ok for four or five times in a row. Hanging up the phone, he asked daddy for one more favor, asking if he could take him to the private airstrip. Daddy said sure. It was only a couple of miles from here and took only a couple of minutes to get there. Howard knotted his head.

Back in the old Ford truck, they drove up to the airstrip. As they approached to airfield, Connie could see an aircraft that was driven by propellers, and the plane had six round windows on each side. The plane had its own stairwell and it was open with two attendants standing on each side of it. Daddy slowly drove up to the stairwell, stopping the truck just a couple yards from the airplane. Howard opened the door and put his feet on the ground. Howard turned around to close the door, and looked at Daddy and Connie. He thanked them for all of their help and placed his head back into the truck and said to daddy, "Polaroid."

The two attendants immediately came over to the truck and escorted Howard to the steps of the plane, and quickly up the stairs he ascended and the doors closed. Daddy and Connie, backed the truck up as the propellers began to spin pulling the plane back up on the blacktop runway. In all but a minute the plane was at the end of the strip and up into the air like a bullet shot. Years later, this system would be known as a STOL, or "short takeoff and landing."

The Rosamond public airport was just one more mile down the road. Daddy and Connie could not understand why Howard did not use the public airfield but wanted to use the private field of the Graves and McClendon's?

Christmas that year was unique for young Connie, as the day before, a new delivery service with a brown truck came to the house, and dropped off a large box with her name on it. On Christmas day, Connie unwrapped it to discover several boxes of film and two white cameras in pretty blue boxes. On the labels of the boxes, it said "Polaroid Instant Camera."

Edwards Air Force Base to its west, where test planes ascended and descended the skies twenty-fours a day. Connie's house laid in the direct flight path of the dry lakes runway that was thirty miles away. Every once in a while, late in the evenings, Connie would be lying in the grass under a tree reading, when a large shadow would pass overhead. Then within twenty seconds or less, a large sonic boom would rattle the house windows. Connie knew that this flying machine was not listed in the public records and must have been some kind of secret weapon in testing.

At night with moon rays and all the bright stars, it would be crazy as these shadows would dance across the dark sky, changing directions in a instance and Connie knowing that the g-forces were to great for any living pilot to handle. It's no wonder that the United States Air Force would be part of her life in the future.

Connie at heart is just a girl looking for love and acceptance from her friends and piers. Only several occasions, she has a couple of run-ins with her best friend, Megan Johnson. Connie and Megan like the same boy and competition at that age can get very "cat-like" between girls at that age. On this particular day, Connie goes to the mail box and receives a letter. Upon opening it, the note from Megan was addressed to Kathy Pickets, whom she has not seen in a couple of months. It reads like a soap opera:

Kat:

I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. I can still remember the months that we spent literally every minute together. They were so much fun, yet so rebellious.

I'm glad that we have changed and matured in the sense that we realized parties, ditching school, and smoking pot aren't so "cool" anymore.

However, what I can say that I miss from those days is when we used to be friends.

We were true friends.

Sure, we had our little disagreements, but for the most part we were always there for each other and we always managed to have fun together. Now, I think we can both agree that if we spent more than a span of 24 hours together, we would rip each other's hair out.

We disagree all the time and just have different priorities now. In all honestly, I feel like you have been using me and the words that you said to me over the summer still stick in my head.

I don't know if you recall the text you sent saying that, "we shouldn't be friends because you needed to get your shit together this year." That hurt me so much.

Here I am, already ashamed that I wouldn't be able to graduate high school and you made me feel even worse. However, I still respect your words. Then, two weeks later, who did you call asking for a ride to court after we hadn't talked since that fight? Me. You called me.

I had my Market Basket interview that day, which if you recall, I went out of my way to make sure I could get you to court because I could tell how much you wanted to go.

Who was there all those nights you wanted to see Jordan after the restraining order?

Who was there when you were moving into your foster home? Who was there for you when there were all the complicated family issues? I think it's fair to say that I have always been there for you. But this is where I draw the line and realize that this was a one way friendship. You used me to see Jordan.

You didn't used to be like this. I can still remember you being there for me last year when all my dad and I did was fight. Now, when I call you, you don't pick up. I leave a message and you don't call back.

I feel used. I can't, I won't, I don't want to take it anymore. Jordan is the only person you care about and apparently, he's the only one that will ever be there for you.

You don't have room for anyone else in your life. I don't want to end this bitterly, so I am just going to finish by saying good luck in life.

Good luck with Jordan.
Good luck with school.
Good luck with everything.
I don't wish you any bad luck at all.

Megan Johnson

The only thing wrong with this letter, it was place in the wrong envelope and addressed to the wrong person. Connie new Jordan, but did not realize that Megan was this involved with Kathy and Jordan. This opened up her eyes. She was taken back completely, which left her mouth dry and her lungs gasping for air.

* * * * *

Most people know there parents and their heritage. Connie's father and mother were truly one of a kind. Her father, 2nd Lieutenant George Anthony Jones who received his commission from the senior United States Senator Alan Krunstone, well after his regular active duty days from the war.

The young Sergeant Jones who happen to be attending the same law school as his son, and who helped him with his studies had visited him on several occasions. The senator took a liking to Jones and after reviewing his career and his many attempts to get a commission decided that he could do something about it.

First, Jones had to resign from the Air Force Reserve and rejoin the California Air National Guard to get his commission. Jones wanted it so much, it was worth it.

Senator Krunstone submitted Jones name along with several other candidates to the governor and it was approved. Doing the transfer process, the senator found himself embroiled in a money laundering scheme involving several other senators across the states. It was very messy and within one year, the senator found himself on the other side of the law and was indicted. Eventually, it would be known to the world as the Charles Keating Five.

However, the senator got caught with his hands in the "cookie jar" and had to resign his congressional seat, leaving all of his appointments in limbo and having the Governor refuse to sign the commission orders canceling the appointments. Jones, one year temporary appointment would vanish in the dust. He could not return to the regular Air Force Reserve and he could not fill the slot allotted for him in the National Guard as an officer nor as a non-commissioned officer. Jones was up the creek without a paddle again.

On the other hand, Connie's mother, a promising young and pretty veterinarian was totally hands on when it came to animals and human rights. Young Becky loved organizing protests and was at the cutting edge of saving our planet and stopping all wars. Her favorite saying was "what if they gave a war and no one came?"

The likelihood of Jones and Cummings getting together was about as certain as the mixing of oil and water. Jones, a football jock that played in a rock band, and Cummings who was the lead singer in a folk rock protest group that sing about freedom was not free.

Jones was in his last days of playing college football and had retired from playing in the grass, and enjoyed more of smoking grass and the free love movement and like Cummings his songs began to take on an air of protest. Jones records were being played on the radio with his band, becoming somewhat of a local celebrity. On the Cummings side of the world, Rebecca played to lived protest rallies and got arrested a lot for blocking the sidewalks and disturbing the peace.

It was not secret that Becky was one of the prettiest girls on campus, and she had the long model legs to prove it. Becky would get a lot of "cat calls and whistles" on her way to classes. She detested these sex crazed maniacal passersby who found any opportunity to pucker their moist lips and give a "holler" across the campus grounds when she would leave class. After all, she was going to be "somebody" and not just a piece of meat at any man's whim.

Every chance that Jones got even close to Becky he would tell her how beautiful she was and would asked her out on a date.

Becky's reply was always, "never!" "You are a pig and you have no manners toward women." I hear your records on the radio and you are just a party guy with no commitments! Only too yourself. You are just pond scum! Don't go away mad. Just go away!"

Jones would just laugh at her and blow her a kiss. What Jones did realize, was that some of Becky's insults made great lyrics to his songs. As crazy as Jones was portrait, he really was smart, a member of the student government and the editor of the student newspaper and yearbook, voted three times to Who's Who in America's Colleges and Universities, and who found Becky to be simply irresistible.

What changed?

Sayble Cummings a student at the local state university was assigned to the English Literature class that happen to include George Anthony Jones. Jones no genius by any means, and was never on the radar of any of the young ladies he went to class with.

With the fifty odd students in the English class, Cummings would get the best grade and highest scores after a test each and every time. The second best grade in class happened to that of Jones. He managed to always finish second to her, and no matter how hard he tried at studying and cramming for this class, he was not better than second place. The professor always graded on a curve, killing off the other students who had no chance of placing in the top five students at all.

The last essay of the class was to be written by teams of two or more students. Sayble wasted no time in inviting Jones to be a member of her team. Jones accepted her invitation. Sayble was having a small study group at her home and invited Jones to come over and help work on the essay.

Jones was early to arrive at the house. Knocking on the door, it happen to be opened by Rebecca Cummings!

"What are you doing here! Jones asked with a surprise voice.

"I live here. Replied Becky.

"So, is Sayble your older sister?"

"No. She is my mother."

"Oh my god."

"Are you going to come in or just stay outside?" Becky continued.

"Yes. I'm coming in."

Jones was tongued tied from that point on. He barely said anything doing the hold time he was at the Cummings house. Mostly from shock. He could not believe that Sayble was the mother of Becky, whom he had tried in vain to date for several semesters, and there in her living room she sit.

The paper was not due until the end of the semester and several meetings with the team at Sayble's house would be made. As Jones was one of the fastest typists in the group, he typed the drafts and arranged the final essay for presentation.

Becky would be busy with her company of friends that would come over to the house after classes. Jones would just observed her interactions with her friends and smile at her. Becky was very popular with the boys and she enjoyed going on hitching and caving trips.

One day, Becky received the first Hewlett-Packard computerized multifunctional calculator in the world. She had received it as a gift from her grandfather, who happened to be an engineer at the Hughes Tools Manufacturing plant in Culver City, California.

All of her nerdy friends were at the house to touch and feel this small handheld creation that would bring change to world forever. After Becky's friends cleared the house, it did not take Jones to long to ask to see this device that had every one drooling over. Becky smiled at Jones and handed it to him, and told him not to drop it.

Jones just smiled at her as he took the unit and looked it over. Jones also attended the computer programming class at the university learning how to write machine language for the IBM computer on campus. Jones expertise on the computer was maintaining and printing out the mailing list for the newspaper. Jones other interest was writing a story for the newspaper on new technology and the world to come.

As time would have it, Jones appeared as part of the household. Greeting fellow students and Becky's friends at the door, Jones took it in stride with a smile and come on in. One of Becky's friends was a horn player by the name of Bobby Knight. Bobby played everything by the music sheet. His comments to Jones standing at the door, would be insulting sometimes.

"I brought your record." Bobby would say. You're not that good of a singer. How do you rate to making a record? I know a lot of real artists that are much better than you. I can't believe you are on the same label as Elvis. You are not that good – at all."

Jones would just smile and asked him if he would like to come in and off he would head to Becky's bedroom to avoid all of the noise the other students were making in the living room.

Sayble and the family had planned a vacation and Becky decided she was not going and wanted to stay home for the weekend. Jones had completed the essay and made copies for the group and was dropping them off at her house for the class.

Becky answering the door, invited Jones in and told him to close it behind him. Becky was cooking a small breakfast and asked him if he wanted to eat something. He said yes. Why not?

Jones told her that he was heading over the hill to the beach in Malibu, and ask her if she wanted to come? He told her that he would pay for dinner and a movie and she could take a walk on the beach. What he did not tell her that he was also attending a party with some of his friends.

Becky was not a party animal and the functions that she attended were slightly organized and were meant for something or someone and not just partying for the fun of it.

Becky and George arrived on the beach just after three o'clock and the water was like glass and at low tide. George loved walking up and down the shore line collecting small animals, shells and sea plants. Becky removed her sandals and joined in the hunt. The water was just perfect. No more than seventy-two degrees and just like bath water. George and Becky took their time and moved from one end of the narrow beach to the other end.

Coming upon a nautilus shell George picked it up and cleaned out the sand and water and proceeded to take a seat on the white soft sandy beach. George laid back on the beach with his eyes closed and placed the shell to his ear trying to ignore the giggles and other sunbathers that floated toward him.

Closing his eyes, George breathe in the salty air as his eyes fixed on the perfect form of Becky's silhouette as she pulled her dress up to her knees and the tide gently rose and fell around her ankles.

George could not let her know that seeing her at that very moment in the soft setting sun light her soft brunette hair that was lit in gold at the ends by the days in the sun. He could not believe that she looked so beautiful, her tall lean body of golden skin.

Becky continued to walk into the surf and for a moment, she glanced up from the water and looked back catching George looking at her.

Becky breathe in, kept her mind closed very tightly, because she could not let him know that she was interested in him and all of the attention he had been giving her at school and at the house.

Becky tried to get comfortable, letting her dress fall back to her knees and smoothing her dress with her hands to her thighs.

After all Becky and George were not compatible—at all. Becky had convinced herself that this was so, and nothing was going to change it.

Becky did not believe in putting on makeup. She totally resented it and she was not going to be a show doll for anyone.

George still lying on his back began visualizing what she would look like in red lipstick, black eyeliner and blue eye shadow. George continuing to listen to the ocean's sound through the shell, for a quick moment he dreamed of running his fingers down her long smooth hair and catching her scent that drove George over the edge. Within an instant like smoke in the wind, George's chest was full of air and regret.

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It was Monday evening around 9:30, Rebecca Cummings was coming from the bathroom and she told my father that she was spotting and she was starting to feel some sharp pains.

Daddy looked at her and then, saying lets get to the doctor. Connie was not due until the middle of July. Becky's bags were all packed and ready at the door for this moment.

It was off to the David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base where Connie would be born. Becky was placed into a wheel chair and rolled right into the examination room.

As Connie's tells her father's story, it's about twenty minutes later that the admitting nurse comes out and tells daddy that they are keeping her and to tell daddy that he had forgot the house shoes.

Daddy, ask the nurse, if the baby had come yet. She tells daddy it will be born in about two hours. So off daddy goes to the house to bring back the shoes. Daddy returned forty-five minutes later.

Becky was already being wheeled into the delivery room when daddy got to her room. It must have been less then twenty minutes, when the nurse was bringing him this small little bundle.

Daddy asked the nurse was it a boy or and girl? The nurse she told daddy that she could not tell him, and that Becky wanted to do that. Daddy asked about Becky and was she all right was everything fine.

The nurse said everything was going to plans and that Becky would be in her room within a few minutes.

It must have been a half an hour before, the nurse came into the waiting room to get daddy. Off he went to see Becky and me. Daddy asked Becky squeezing her hand, and kissing her on her forehead, was it a boy or a girl?

She told daddy that it was a girl. Daddy said that he picked her up from the baby's bed. She weighed only a few pounds. Her little eyes were open and he could not believe it, that something so small could extract so much feeling and to touch something so delicate, such a mystery and so much love. Daddy would

always say that he could not believe that he help to create something in this world that was so great and so precious.

If daddy never did or be successful at anything, this little bundle of joy was greater than anything he could every do in his life.

Shortly after Connie was born daddy got orders to report to Vietnam. Attempting to move up the latter in rapid advancement placed daddy directly in the path to war. He was hoping to beat the system, but the old man was right. Fast rise in the ranks places you first in line for the war. According to daddy's orders he had two months to report back to Travis for transportation to Saigon, Vietnam where he was going to be the new post master.

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Connie quietly sets on the sofa in her small living room, and overlooking the fireplace, is the pyramid shape burial flag of her father. She lifted up from the couch and made her way to the flag and with her right hand gave it a gently rub, wishing her dad was still with her, so that she could tell him a story of her adventures.

Connie just wanted to laugh just a little. The comedy channels and some of those crazy situation comedies just were not her cup of tea. So she just decided to call it an evening and go to bed.

With her right hand, Connie gently placed the moisturizing cream on her fingertips and then upon her forehead, as she started to make mini circles in a counter-clockwise position as she glazed deeply into her own eyes from the reflection in the mirror.

The dark circles and lines on her now aging face began to show the wear and tear of years of living, yet in her heart, she was still that young girl of seventeen years old and full of promise for family and adventure.

Looking back at her face, she was just now an old lady that had lived long enough to retire as a major from the Air Force Reserves and regretting that she never got the chance to make it to Colonel or even been recommended for the general ranks.

In her mine, she had failed to make it to Lieutenant Colonel. She barely made it out of the rank of captain and was on the list to be rifted out of the service all together if she did not make it to the rank of major.

She only made it because of her service record and her accumulated post service points that placed her over the line by one point. Connie was at the bottom of the promotions list, but she had made it to the field ranks.

She had been a major for over ten years now, and there were no more promotions in her future.

Gently, her fingers circled her face, massaging her temples and then her forehead. Connie's mind began to flash back as she touched the scars above her cheek, as she gave pause to the mission and the person that placed this reminder upon her.

For one moment, she was transported back in time to that day and time that left her as the soul survivor of the deadliest mission of her life.

"It was all for King and country." Connie muttered to herself.

The Nine O'clock evening news was on the television, when a hard knock on the front door of Connie's modest condominium followed with a steady hammering of the door bell summoning her.

Connie was startled out of her mind, as she never receives callers pass eight o'clock at night. The knocks sounded urgent and more like the police on a house to house search or evacuation.

With Jones face still covered in her facial mask, she causally approached the peek hole of the door, and looking out to see who was trying so hard to get her attention.

She noticed two persons in Air Force uniforms. One was a woman with her hair tied back into a pony tail, and was the one doing all of the pounding on the door.

"What do you want? Jones shouted back from behind the door.

"Major Consuelo Louise Jones?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

The agent at the door placed her credentials into the small peek hole and said, "Major, we are from the United States Air Force Office of Special Investigation, and your presence is urgently required at the Pentagon. We are here to escort you to the Joint Chief of Staffs office post haste.

"Major may we come in?"

Jones, not taking any chances, placed one knee behind the door, with the safety chain still on. The agents wasted no time in placing their badges into the opening, and a cell phone with the speaker phone on, asking "Major, this is General Fred Smith, are you there?"

"Yes sir. This is Major Jones. How may I help sir?"

"Major Jones, we have an emergency. I need you at the office ASAP." Smith purred. "These officers will take you to us. Please get here as soon as you can, ok?"

"General Smith?" Connie said, "I'll be with these officers and will be there within the hour.

"Thank you major. I'll have your papers and credentials waiting for you at the sign-in desk. I better tell you right now, you will not be coming back to your house for a couple of days.

Connie was in her full dressed blue uniform as she sat in the Pentagon outside the office of the Air Force Commander's Office of Special Investigation.

She was not ready for the greeting that she would receive when the Non-commissioned officer in-charge of the General's office asked her to accompany him to meet the General.

General Smith, nearing his last year as the head of the OSI's Department of the Air Force, signaled Jones to enter his office.

"Sir, Major Consuelo Jones reporting as ordered."

"Major, please have a seat." The general said as he pointed to a plush red chair in from of his desk.

Connie stared into his deep grey eyes for the first time. Connie had a strange feeling deep down in her soul. In a nano second, Connie somehow knew this person.

His presence was overwhelming, yet she sense that somewhere in her life, she and the general's paths had crossed. She didn't remember when or where, but it would come to her. She started remembering that person with the dark eyeglasses sitting in the rear of the classroom those many years ago.

She started to remember his mannerisms.

Just a quiet type of person, that gave no movement, no emotion, no inkling of what secrets he carried.

As if a bolt of lightning had just hit her, Connie's memory placed a young General Smith well over twenty years ago, as one of the observers in the class room that month, when the young Lieutenant was one of the students.

"Major, I have requested your presences here to help us with a sticky situation we are having on our borders, and the president has asked for your participation and you have been placed on active duty as of last night.

"For your support and contribution in advance, the president has upgraded your security clearance, and has also upgraded your rank to full Colonel.

"Congratulations Colonel Jones! Now we must get to the task at hand, which is not a very pleasant one."

High in the Colorado Rockies, three Air National Guard Lear Jets were being lead into the hangar. The governors from the Border States were deplaning, and all but one plane was late. Governor Philip Sanchez of Texas was the last plane the group was waiting for.

High in the sky and circling the airport was his jet plane. Touching down and taxing into the hangar all of the governors proceeded to the small restaurant above the terminal.

Sanchez was greeted by Governors Jean Lamb of Arizona, William Fields of New Mexico, and Howard Stanton of California. These leaders were here for a short private meeting to confirm and proceed with the plans to succeed from the Union of the United States and invade the United States of Mexico.

The United Drug Cartels had taken over the government of Mexico and is holding the Mexico capital and its congress of hostages. President Ricky Windham of the United States has consistently refused to send troops to Mexico and help repel the cartels hold on the Mexican states, in spite of the pleas for help by their leaders.

The only plan that the United States Government had offered the Mexicans was several years earlier for the military advancement across the border, when the Congress of the United States offered to pay each political leader in the Mexican leadership a modest sum of Two Million dollars each and asylum in the United States for voting to let the United States access their country, making Mexico part of the United States.

Pablo Lujan sits in a modest hacienda on the edge of the Pacific ocean near the city of Xhalpha. His well guarded home with a beautiful view of the passing marine life from the shore, Pablo smokes a fresh Cuban Cigar. On the satellite dish, he observes the recorded battles of his men as they destroy the local cities and kill anyone that goes against him.

Across this great country, Lujan managed to recruit very poor young boys who were often foster kids or just runaways. Lujan also had many law enforcement officers from the local police and federal military officers that took money to look the other way while his drug delivers to various locations across the United States border towns. Lujan continued the killing spree that has left more than 200,000 men, women and children dead, including 150 United States Counsel Generals, border patrol, and various agents.

The fighting is all but over, as the United States refuses to sent in troops, and the Mexican congress all but surrenders to the new president from the drugs cartel.

"It all sounds very interesting, President Pablo Dominez-Rodrigues-Lujan, el presidente de la Estates de Mexico," said Special Agent Manuela Ortega of the United States Secret Service, as she was preparing the President's Daily Briefing book.

As Agent Ortega continues placing line items on the agenda, she comes across, an entry from the CIA field office in Mexico City about the decision on Project Santa Ana Hidalgo.

Ortega's eyebrows shifted from left to right and then back again. She looked at the name. As her breath began to quicken, she spoke out loud so she thought.

"Operation Santa Ana Hidalgo? She said under her breath. Oh My God, I have not heard that name in over twenty years. Ortega's mind began to flashback to the days of the war college and her roommate that wrote that thesis. "Consuelo Louise Jones."

It had been years, and why Ortega remembers this name and the person associated with it. Ortega was one of the students in the class that highly critiqued Jones on her hypothetical.

Who would ever believe it? It was a contingency rehearsal that every student in the United States War College had to write. Usually the instructors gave a country and the conditions on which the battle plans were to be built around.

Ortega had not heard of that plan in over twenty years. She remembers approximately fifty students who had to write an invasion, security, logistical, and peace plan.

The exercise this time was based on Mexico.

The war college's intensive exercise on creating wars on other countries by the United States are archived and stored in its extensive database for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the president.

Operation Santa Ana Hidalgo was not one of the top ten papers written by the Class of 1975, 2nd Lieutenant Consuelo Louise Jones. It was voted as one of the worst and the craziest papers ever written for an invasion of a country; do to drugs and violence on the border towns of the United States. The paper that Jones wrote was so totally off the charts back then, the majority of the class believed that she was on drugs.

The hypothetical she wrote about included the deaths of law enforcement agents on the U.S. side, plus the corruption of all the Mexican law officials and government workers by the killing of all family members of the law enforcement officers on the payroll who failed to carry out the wishes of the drug lords.

That year Lt. Jones finished at the bottom of the class with her thesis and received the "Kerry Dale Award" for the least impressive paper in the class. The Dale award was first given in 1850 to Captain Kerry Dale for his paper on the invasion of the Mason-Dixon Line of the slave states.

The Solicitor General of the United States glided down the gangway to the tarmac of the airport and into the hangar. All of the border state governors were all together now, and Gregory Mansville took the center stage in the small café with papers from the president.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the president sends you his greetings and kindly ask that all of you obey the orders to succeed from the Union, and not to invade the State of Mexico." He said.

"He understands your positions and is trying to work out all of the details with what's left of the Mexican government.

"The kind and gentle people of the Republic of Texas has had enough of this administration, and have directed me as their governor to take any action necessary to secure its borders and prevent my sheriffs from being killed by these f-ing bastards and the kidnapping of my citizens. What the hell is he waiting for? For hell to freeze over? Sanchez blurred out.

"No Governor Sanchez. It's very complicated.

"No General Mansville. It's not complicated at all. The President has no clue. None at all. It's beyond time for him to shit or get off the pot." My people want action today. Not tomorrow!

"Governors? Please. Please. I beg of you don't do anything that you will regret later. This saber rattling by you border states are killing the chances for the president to do anything. You have got to give us more time."

"General Mansville, " Governor Jean Lamb interjected.

"The people of the Republic of Arizona is at its wits end. No more lies from this administration. We are not going to listen anymore. You have failed to take action to guard our borders, and my people are being kidnapped and murdered."

"Governor Lamb, we are working on this action as we speak."

"We beg your indulgence on this federal matter and let the us do our jobs.

"What is your job General Mansville? We believe its best that you take these succession papers back to the president with our condolences and let him know that enough is enough." Governor Stanton shouted out.

"Just give us five days to turn this situation around. We have a plan that is sound and a "win-win" for all the states.

"Like the border cameras and electronic fences put up by the government without any input from the agencies that are on the front lines. We have been fighting the war on drugs and illegals for over thirty-five years, and we are still loosing the war. And you have a plan? So does my pet dog Fido. When it's lightning and thundering outside he goes under the bed for several days. Is that your win-win you are talking about general?"

"Governors all of you are talking treason here."

"Don't thank so, general. Sanchez spoke back. We have a succession clause in our state's constitution, and I am ready to exercise our rights this very moment. We will give the federal government forty-eight hours to close its offices and

remove its property from our republic, if you guys don't come up with a solution within a given amount of time."

Chapter Two

It's seven thirty in the morning at the Oval office of the White House and outside in the hallways, it is buzzing with the chiefs of the military and all of the Senators from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California are there early for the forced meeting with the president as his bequest.

As they wait outside the office, cell phones ring madly from each of the visitors, one call right after another.

In the year of 1975, Connie and several of her friends decided to drive from Phoenix to the Mexican town of Rocky Point. It's only takes a couple of hours to drive to the Sea of Cortez. Connie had been here many times and loved the drive and the sea food.

Rocky Point is where all of the retired Americans go to settle down and live on the rich Mexican coastal city. But this drive was different, as soon as Connie and her companions entered the country; the federal army had setup road blocks and was checking each vehicle for guns and contraband.

It must have been only fifty miles from the last check point, when the federal army against, had the cars pulled over to the side of the road and was checking them again.

By the time the trio had reached Rocky Point, they had been pulled over and searched over five times. This was beyond the usual searches, and it was getting a little annoying.

What were the Mexican government looking for? Guns! Lots of Guns! It appeared that American citizens were smuggling guns into the country to these alleged border drug rings.

Connie was only twenty-one years old and just had graduated from the Air Forces' ROTC program at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. She had got her chance to attend officers training after finishing basic training that took her over four months to complete. It was doing her last week of basic, that she was informed that she had been accepted to the academy.

Connie did not have a break in training, as she was transferred to the officers school without going home, as her classes began one week early before her graduation from regular basic.

All of Connie's military wardrobe had to be changed out, as the officers had different dress from the regulars.

Being two weeks early for her new class, and two weeks on her own after finishing her military basic training program, she had two weeks as a bastard

child. She was not longer a basic airman, and she was not an officer, just listed as Air Force Officer Cadet Consuelo Jones and she could not stay at the officers school or attend the officers mess.

Jones was called into the drillmaster's office, and with her fist, she delivered two hard knocks on the door.

"Come in, the drill master barked.

"Airman Jones reporting as ordered Drill Sergeant."

"Jones as you were."

"I have your transfer orders here, and you are just a couple days away from leaving here, and it's crazy for you to be seating around here by yourself. Your time is so short, you don't have enough of it to go back to California for a couple of days. So here are your orders Cadet Jones and you are to report to Captain Richard Smith at the officers training center. Congratulations, and let me be the first one to salute you."

"Thank you Drill Sergeant." She said, as Jones dropped her salute back to him.

"Jones, you are four months ahead of everyone else that will be attending your training unit.

"You will not be dragged again, through the stuff that everyone else will have to go through. It's not going to be easy, but easier for you.

"As they say, been there and done that.

"Go roll your things up and get on over to the Captain's office. This way, I'll give you a head start on anyone else that will be reporting to the captain early as you.

It was 0800 when Connie reported to the officers training school and Captain Smith. With her duffle bag on her shoulder, she was directed to her quarters that held four cadets. As the first one in the class, she had a choice of the rooms and the beds. As a rank of Enlisted Two (E-2), she will out rank all the other cadets reporting in. The dormitory held sixty cadets and Connie was the dorm chief and flight leader as she was the only cadet that had reported to duty for this class at this time.

as you Connie had to attend a ninety day school for all non-medical personnel at the Department of Defense's War College in Langley, Virginia.

With her orders in hand, Connie checked into the officers' dormitory. The housekeeping staff and placed each of the cadet's names on their doors. Connie collected her keys and went to the elevator and went up to the tenth floor. The long hallway that Connie looked down seamed like forever. Connie reaching the dorm room, with her name on the door, and noticed that her roommate was one 2nd Lt. Manuela Ortega. Upon opening the room, she expected to find Ortega there, but she realized that she was the first one there and had choices of beds and which side of the room. As they say, first come, first served.

Connie managed to roll her Samsonite luggage into the room and proceeded to unpack and place her personal effects into the chest of drawers and relax from the long trip.

It must have been a couple of hours, before the Connie's door was opening and backing into the room with several bags being dragged in behind her was 2nd Lieutenant Manuela Ortega.

Ortega is also an ROTC graduate from the University of New Mexico, and as with Connie, she too is scheduled for the War College program.

The two young women exchange greetings.

Connie got up from the bed, and helped Manuela pull in her bags and placed them on Manuela's bed. As with Connie's belongings, Manuela places her things into the drawers and sits on the bed, kicking off her military platform shoes, she begins to rub her feet.

"Those damn shoes, Ortega moans. I've got to get use to those things."

"I really can understand that. I've marched many miles and stood in formation in those things for hours at a time." The two laughed out loud with Manuela flopping on the bed.

"I'm getting hungry, Ortega said.

"Yea. Me too. The officers mess club is across the street. But I want to go to Hell's Kitchen and see all of the new recruits coming in." Connie said.

"Hell's Kitchen?"

"All of the new recruits that come into the Army here, goes through this place, and as crazy and chaotic as it sounds, the food is really good."

Both of the girls began to laugh. As they only heard about Hell's Kitchen from other officers that went into the military school from basic training.

Chapter Three

Connie and Maria were sitting near the front of the class, when the Professor entered the room. Lieutenant Colonel Fredrick Johnson, United States Army. Upon entering the class room, the class was called to attention as the Colonel entered the room. Fifty officers of the field ranks to captain. Ususally, if you are a captain and in this class, it means that you are a late bloomer or you have been asked back to improve a war college plan you wrote, or to create a new one.

Chapter Four

When you join the United States Armed Services, you are trained as a rifleman first, and everything else including uniforms, rank, titles and paperwork is secondary.

It had been over nine months now that Connie had been away from her parents and her home. It was not too hard for Connie to trade in one desert for another high desert back in Rosamond.

Connie dreamed of riding her horse "Dusty" and bicycling up the small hills and back into the mountains of the Silver Queen mines where the likes of Williams S. Hart, Hop along Cassidy, John Wayne and many of the Hollywood cowboys made movies close to the old Willow Springs Overland Stage Lines.

She was on the last leg of her self defense training that placed her on temporary active duty in Fallon, Nevada. It is the home of the United States Navy's underwater close combat training division out in the middle of Northern Nevada.

Believe it or not, there is a large fresh water lake in this isolated desert area with a working submarine in it.

This place is also one of the main bunker sites for housing the military's atomic munitions. Why fresh water training? Jones had no idea. Just like anything else the Department of Defense wants to do with their personnel, they prepare for the future. These classes consist of everyone across the branches of the service. Everyone is on the same page no matter the uniform.

There was a rumor going around that we would be doing night jumps in the middle of Nevada, a place they lovingly called "Area 51." The only great thing anyone could add to the "story" was that the place was loaded with rattle snakes, and the state was going to widen the highway. Over the past nine and one half months, Connie had been too jump school, combat defensive training, military strategies, navigational topology, officers training school, basic communications, basic electronics and now sky diving at night.

Jumping out of a perfectly good airplane in the dead of night did not thrill Connie, and she was not up for this part of the training routine. It was the last school task she had to go through for graduation and then off to California on a much needed vacation.

Connie's new assignment was somewhere off in a place called the Republic of Vietnam in the Southern part of Eastern Asia. She was part of a group of officers and non-commissioned officers that were assigned as "advisors" to the Vietnamese military. Connie was assigned as the aid to the Counsel General of the United States Embassy.

they we would be training on journey to No one calls Consuelo, "Connie", except for her close working associates in their line of business outside the United States. The voice was very familiar, it was Fred Johnson.

Chapter Five

Agent William Hunter was one of the students in the class room. He was just an observer sitting in the back of the room. His job was to evaluate each of the students from a far. He never asked any questions. He was never asked any questions, and the instructors never admitted that he was even in the room with them. He was an invisible man behind the dark glasses. He was not just there. He was looking for a replacement agents.

Chapter Six

Our target in Central America is Hector Garcia. He is the person most likely to be on the receiving end of a bullet by the CIA. He is a very despicable. He has several women slaves at his beck and call. But there is one in particular that is interesting. Her name is Jasmine. She is mentally off balanced and confused. Garcia's loves to abuse her. She appears to be pregnant, and can you imagine any human being that is so low that he rapes her consistently and beats her. She is so devoted and protective of this scum bag, approaching him is almost impossible. Jasmine is more deadly than the target we are attempting to eliminate.

Connie was very interested in world geography.

After parasailing into the jungle at night, we managed to land in an area where we followed an helical cliff and then across a long, dark plateau of some kind until we came to a lake. After a four hour boat ride we landed on a deforested shore, where we walked for several hours on a narrow path through trees. It was there we reached the clearing with the continuous fire and the tepees that became our base camp.

Chapter Seven

It was a terrible night as Connie and John walked straight into a fire fight with the cartels gunmen. They were out numbered ten to one. She had to make every shot count. There was no backup. They had been deceived.

The fire fight was very intense. Hot lead was flying everywhere; bodies were falling by the scores. It was mass chaos. The captors were using the Chinese made AK-47C, automatic, with the semi-stop grounded off to make this firearm an automatic unit. The sound of this unit is very unique as it roars emitting deadly bursts of fire to anyone or anything that challenges its position.

Connie and John were protected by a steel and concrete layer between her shooters and her position. When the rebels stop firing and was no longer a threat to her location or had been neutralized, Connie stepped out from behind the barrier with her twenty shot Glockenspiel's barrel was smoking white hot from the return fire. This was real life situation. When people try to accomplish heroic deeds, sometimes they get injured or even killed in the line of duty.

As Connie cleared her position, she turned to find John bleeding with several shots to his upper chest area. He had taken several bullets that had ripped into him. Connie holstered her fire arm and started first aide on John to little avail. John died in her arms. She laid his head down on the ground with her hand under his head.

They were covered in blood.

John's blood.

Connie felt inadequate and inept all at the same time.

She found herself mumbling to the wind. She released his hand, and took his weapon. She was visibly upset. Connie had no choice but to continue the mission. This was not the time to break down and cry. This was the time to get tough and ready to rumble, again.

"I was suppose to be the protector of women, children and old people from the terrible people that may want to takeaway our tomorrows. In John's eyes, one day I hope to regain my lost glory and keep his memory alive.

Connie dug a grave for John and began to place his remains in the hole. Occasionally, tears would form in the corner of her eyes and rapidly roll down her cheeks. With the back of her hand, she would wipe away the tears, and continue placing stones upon his grave, so that the wild animals would not dig into it and take him away. She had to secure her partners resting place.

Despite her attempt to focus on the task at hand, Connie was getting more and more depressed and angry as the hours, days and weeks passed and no help was fore coming. For the present, Connie would fade in and out of

consciousness do to the lack of stimulation by another human being, even if it was the enemy. Slowly before dawn, Connie slipped into a fretful sleep.

Connie lay on her grass mat, looking up into the palm tree laced cabin ceiling. Despite that fact that she was very tired and her captors were nowhere, but she knew they were everywhere and all around, her mind would not let her get any sleep.

Why was she here?
Who is my gracious host?
What is going to happen to me?

As her eyes searched the darkness far beyond the areas illuminated by the torches at the doors, her memories of her first days in the hands of the police, drug cartel, private security, or whom ever that had her, Connie was ready for a chance.

It was another day, as Connie toured her island again, looking for any and every cuing of vantage and attempting to discover some kind of landmarks that she may have missed earlier.

No matter what direction Connie traveled, there was nothing, but unbroken lines of water in every direction she turned.

Standing on the summit of this horseshoe island surrounded by ocean water, Connie had not idea in which direction to go. Connie was having mixed emotions about leaving this paradise. In Connie mind she remembered her professor's lesson about change.

She remembers the line, "We resist change, the professor said. "But it comes anyway."

Connie had held her ground for over five days now. She was beyond fatigue, and was eating anything around her. Grass, leaves, twigs whatever she could lay her hands on. Out of the small open in the cave near the large lake, she could see several of her opponents with guns, waiting for something, anything to happen. Connie was experiencing periods of abject depression.

The opposition just wanted to neutralize her, but they were not going to sent in any assassins to finish the job. Connie new that if she did not do anything to get out of there, she was going to just wither away.

Chapter Eight

"You can open your eyes now, Senorita Jones, as he removed the blind fold from her eyes. Her captor then started lighting makeshift candles with a small hand torch. As the fold slipped passes her eyes, there was a echoing powerful memory and emotion that rushed pass her, leaving Connie speechless and unable to move. The light from the torches just standing outside the makeshift cabin entrance caught the deep dark ripples on the tops of the lake waters that danced of Consuelo's eyes.

Connie slowly removed the blind. She gently stood up from the small wooden barrel, looking around, Connie stepped out into the night air looking up into the skies, which were overcastted and left her with no direction for the moment. Each of the items in the room was awkwardly placed there and nothing matched.

Senorita Jones, please relax. There is no where for you to go. This place is very isolated. So if you feel the need to run away, be our guest. You will only end up back here in this very spot.

On the sandy shore of the lake, Connie eyed all of the transportation options that she could used to escape. There was not even one old boat, a piece of wood, and twig of any kind.

Nothing.

And the sky was still cloudy.

It must have been several days as Connie had walked around the lake for the hundredth time, or so it seamed. Around and behind the small cabin with old palm leaves, in a barricade of small alcoves and caves that dotted this small place, Connie was yet to get a fix on her location.

Connie just set on the sand, playing with sticks. The first stick in the sand caste a shadow that was odd. Then estimating fifteen minutes, Connie placed another stick in the sand, and began to draw a straight line and the shadows from the sun, pointed to the west. It's shadow was reversed.

Connie standing in the placid lake, with the water just splashing below her knees, with one hand, Connie scoops up a hand full of lake water and taste it. The water is fresh.

Connie knows that the lake is in the middle of a horseshoe island, that's water locked. She had to know that leaving here alive will be slim and none. She has no time to think about being young woman, with a husband, kids, grand kids, and a real career at being just a mommy or any of that stuff.

Connie's only quest at this late point in time was to get back to the mission at hand and carrying out her duties to the last breathe. Indeed, she was still a serviceman, and rejection of the code was futile.

Connie stretched out on the small mat bed in the cabin. Her captors had long vanished in the middle of the night, leaving her alone. The place was loaded with bananas, fruit and nut trees. Connie did realize one thing, that several of the plants were indigenous to only one area of the Central American finger. She realizes that she is not in Mexico.

"She walks in beauty." It was abrupt and insensitive. Connie detested self-pity. Connie ran up the side of the small hill that overlooked the inland lake. She thought she heard the lake waters lapping gently on its shores. With a flat lake, it was an unmistakable sign that something or someone was coming this way.

Chapter Nine

Connie was well into her morning swim, when she began to feel an unsettling presences in the water. Connie turned toward the lake shore, and paddling for her life, she opened her eyes and laid a course to the humble cabin. When the feeling would not go away.

Connie trying to keep her mind busy, began reciting a poem she wrote when she was in the fourth grade that when something like this:

Mom,
You are my biggest supporter,
And maybe my only.
You're always there to talk to me
On the nights that I feel lonely.

Physically or mentally,
You're always there for me.
When I'm in my darkest times,
It's the light you help me see.

I want you to know,
That no matter what you do,
No matter how hard we fight,
I will always love you.
A mother is someone there to support you,
With any help you need.
A mother is someone there to help you,
When she hears a plead.

A mother is there to protect you,
In any way it takes.
A mother is there to let you learn,
Even while watching you make mistakes.

But mom, you are so different,
Than any mom I've ever known.
You're always there to talk to,
So that I don't feel so alone.

You have always supported me,
Even when you haven't agreed.
You have always told me how much you love me
When I was most in need.

I know that you belive in me
And anything I decide to do.

You make me a better person
Because of all the things I've learned from you.

I just wanted to let you know,
No matter what I say or do,
There's nothing that can change
Just how much I love you.

There was nothing unusual about the lake or the landscape that greeted his eyes. However, on the other side of the lake, the horizon feathered a broken line toward the small hills to the north.

What piqued her curiosity?

The concussion blast from the air burst lifted Connie up and threw her backwards at least fifty feet, with her body being twisted in midair as she flew. There was no soft landing as the churned-up mud and debris began to fall all around her. It was going to be a hard landing with nothing to cushion her fall into the large empty space in the ground. With a crunching thud, her face and then the rest of her body, hitting the flat walls of the large hole. Connie slid down the mud fill hole with the mud filling her ears, her nose and her mouth.

Connie's semi-automatic pistol had already been blown out of her hand, as had her clothes, shoes and everything else that was attached to her body. Connie continued her headlong slide down the sharply sloping wall, mud gathering around her neck and collar and pouring down inside her clothes. She finally can to rest, face down in a pool of putrid water that had fill the blast hole.

She slowly lifted her head from the mud filled hole, spitting and coughing and looked upward at the lip of the crater from where she had just fallen. In an instant, the noxious mix of smoke and dirty gray mist rolled up and another blast concussion from another explosion tore through the air.

It must have been instinct from basic training as Connie dunked her face back into the muddy hole, while the fury above her head passed, leaving within a couple of seconds which seemed like an eternity.

She waited a few seconds, then started to scramble her way up the crater. She was breathing hard, but the explosions had stopped, but she could hear at least one machine gun in the distance.

Suddenly on the other side of the blast crater, she noticed two eyes staring back at her. These eyes pierced from the mud caked face straight back at her. Unlike Connie, this person was in the prone position and a dark bloody patch poured his life out of the hole and onto the muddy ground. It was little that Connie could do for him. He was dead.

Connie felt a new wave of fear starting to build making her sick to the pit of her stomach. A cartel soldier stood over her as she could see him starting to

squeeze the trigger of the pistol. Connie pushed out her hand in a vain gesture of protection and started to scream. Connie braced her for the impact of the shots as she closed her eyes. It was a little too late as a bright flash of orange emitted from the barrel of the gun, as the pistol emptied.

The impact did not come. She was shaking even more as the soldier held up the pistol again to take fire. She braced herself again and yet nothing happened. Connie had no weapon, and with her left leg, she kicked the pistol from his hand and delivered a chilling karate chop to his throat dropping him face down into the mud hole. Connie pushed his face into the muddy water forcing him into the hole, as he flopped around, Connie did not loosen her grip and within a couple of minutes, his body went limp. Connie searched the dead gunman's waist band and pulled out his survival knife that she immediately placed at her side.

Connie had no weapon to fire with only the knife. Should she stay put or scramble free from the crater and run like hell? At that moment, another figure loomed from behind the cloud of smoke and peered over the lip of the crater. Connie could see that this new figure was a lot heavier and savvy than the one she just put down. He moved with confidence that only a professionally trained soldier could have, and that was the skill of survival. His weapon had the same distinctive markings and the silhouette of his predecessor that she had disarmed. It signified only one thing. This time she was going to die.

Connie's mind began to wonder about what a life she could have had, if only. . . she had time. Anytime in this life. Connie's thoughts fixed upon an old William Faulkner's quote that one of her offensive combat instructors told her, ". . . that the past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past." Just then another fresh barrage of gunfire kicked up mud and dirt above her head, sending out sharp flecks of splinter rocks and sand at the lip of the crater. At times, it felt like drizzling rain drops from a monsoon storm.

Connie ran her tongue over her parched lips with her mouth crackling dry and sweat dripping from her forehead. Tracer bullets lit up the now dark sky around her lighting up the position of the lone gunman remaining that was firing from the other side of the road. Then suddenly it was dark again.

Connie knew she had to eliminate this hitman to break free of her position and escape to the beach for a chance at getting rescued. The muzzle flashes revealed the only route visible between the trees lining the road and the beach.

Despite this soldier's heavier build, he descended the side of the bomb crater with ease, jumping into the mud and straddling his comrade's body with his weapon pointed down at her. He wasted no time in evaluating the situation and planning his assessment, then made his decision.

The soldier raised the barrel of his AK-47 and placed a bayonet on its muzzle and slowly moved toward her.

Connie caught the soldier's eyes, but they showed no passion, no trepidation and no enthusiasm. He had no conscious at all as it had been exhausted long ago from years of fighting and slow destruction.

The soldier pinned the bayonet under Connie's chin, resting it temporarily on her throat. Connie felt the perforation on her skin and prayed for a quick death. He looked down at her, steadied his balance in the mud fill crater, and with a grunt, pushed the cold hard steel into Connie's neck.

Chapter Ten

The Cornwallis and Associates building was blown to bits with its debris covering hundreds of yards. Office papers, desks, chairs, and personal effects had gently settled down around the once beautiful two story building that was the site of the United States Department of Transportation.

It was also the office of the Central Intelligence Agency's Mexican Operations Northern division. Under the mantle of Cornwallis & Associates, this unit was in alternative energy development.

What lead the Mexican cartels to this unit in Phoenix was still unknown, until a double agent was left for dead in the Chihuahua Desert on the Arizona and Mexican border.

Chapter Eleven

Connie tried to dry off her forehead with her dirty sleeve leaving dollops of mud on her face. Her blood trickled down her neck onto her blouse from the bayonet cut.

She had moved at the last possible millisecond, sliding her neck past the bayonet that plunged into the bank of the blast hole, pushing the weapon to the side with her arm.

This push gave Connie just enough space and leverage to reposition her driving the soldier's body weight into the survival knife plunged into his upper torso killing him instantly, and dropping him face down on top of his comrade.

She slowly removed the knife, pulling it out of him with reservation, and just for good measure, Connie twisted it from side to side and back up to make sure he was really dead.

Connie disarming the rifle from the dead man's hands, pushed his body over to the side of the mud hole.

She took the weapon and released the ammo clip to count the number of shots left in it.

She reached over the dead man's body and loosens his ammunition's belt and removed it.

Peeping up out of the crater, Connie looked around and noticed that it was only one target left she needed to eliminate to escape.

Connie laid a bouquet of flowers on the grave site of ----- . She looked up into the lighted interior of the helicopter and invoked the name of ----- . She gently layed the flowers upon the grave.

"It's been over twenty years ago that you died for me and gave me your life. And just for one moment, Connie's abandonment of the mission that left great and deep scars on her face and on her soul would never bring him back.